

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL)

A EUROPEAN OVERVIEW

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Abstract. *This article deals with the content and language integrated learning. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become a focus of attention in recent years, particularly in the state sector in various countries and on the interface with the private school and university sector.*

Keywords: *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), approach, methods, skills, techniques.*

Introduction: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become a focus of attention in recent years, particularly in the state sector in various countries and on the interface with the private school and university sector. CLIL is the subject of ongoing debate in the UK national was one of the main centres of attention at last year's IATEFL conference. Along with the processes of joint political press, and, economic and cultural activity and increased mobility across borders has come the realization that a united Europe contains a huge diversity of languages and that if successful and continued expansion is to take place, communication pays a central role. There are a number of key considerations:

Even if English remains the lingua franca, individual countries cannot be expected to relegate their own languages to second place in internal matters, and it has always been the case that some nations have strong views regarding the use of other tongues within their own borders [1].

Given the above, together with increased linguistic contact, there will be an increase the need for communicative skills in a second or third language.

Languages, therefore, will play a key role in curricula across Europe, and attention needs to be given to the training of teachers and the development of frameworks and methods which will improve the quality of language education.

The logic of these conclusions is backed up by clear policy statements. Proficiency in three Community languages is stated as one of the objectives of education in Europe in the European Commission's White Paper on 'Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society'. The vision of a bilingual and multilingual Europe is clear. The European Commission, through funded research projects in universities across Europe, has been investigating the state of language teacher training and bilingual education since the early-90s, pulling together the threads of existing approaches such as 'content-based instruction', 'language supported subject learning', 'immersion', 'teaching subjects through a foreign language', and 'bilingual/plurilingual education'. All the afore-mentioned terms suggest a strong relationship between language learning and the learning of other 'content' subjects, with CLIL, the term having originally been defined in 1994 and launched by UNICOM in 1996, emerging as the most promising and beneficial approach .

The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was originally defined in 1994, and launched in 1996 by UNICOM, University of Jyväskylä and the European Platform for Dutch Education, to describe educational methods where ‘subjects are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language’. The essence of CLIL is that content subjects are taught and learnt in a language which is not the mother tongue of the learners. Knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content, language is integrated into the broad curriculum, learning is improved through increased motivation and the study of natural contextualized language, and the principle of language acquisition becomes central. Broadly speaking, CLIL provides a practical and sensible approach to both content and language learning whilst also improving intercultural understanding, and has now been adopted as a generic term covering a number of similar approaches to bilingual education in diverse educational contexts. The evolution of CLIL involves precedents such as immersion programmes (North America), education through a minority or a national language (Spain, Wales, France), and many variations on education through a “foreign” language.

Earlier notions such as ‘language across the curriculum’ and ‘language supported subject learning’ have been assimilated into CLIL, and judging by the variety and number of CLIL-based projects ongoing in Europe and elsewhere, it may no longer be relevant to question which is the dominant partner in the language-content relationship (content in English or English through content). What is fundamental to CLIL is that language and content are taught and learned together in a dual-focused classroom context, and there are a number of related reasons why this might be the way forward if a bilingual or multilingual society is the goal.

The theory behind CLIL has foundations in interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching which provides a meaningful way in which students can use knowledge learned in one context as a knowledge base in other contexts. Many of the important concepts, strategies, and skills taught in the language arts are "portable", i.e. they transfer readily to other content areas. Strategies for monitoring comprehension, for example, can be directed to reading material in any content area while cause-and-effect relationships exist in literature, science, and social studies. Thus, interdisciplinary teaching helps learners to apply, integrate and transfer knowledge, and fosters critical thinking. Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching can increase students' motivation for learning. In contrast to learning skills in isolation, when students participate in interdisciplinary experiences they see the value of what they are learning and become more actively engaged. Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching provides the conditions under which effective learning occurs. Students learn more when they use language skills to explore, write and speak about what they are learning [2]. Cross-curricular teaching is characterised by thematic units, offering the teacher flexibility over a period of time in terms of adopting a strict content-based or more global timetable of lessons.

One of the criticisms of standard parallel content and language programmes and some bilingual programmes is that there is little evidence to show that the comprehension of content is not impeded by lack of language competence. CLIL identifies a ‘transition’ stage at which learners become fully functional in both languages, and is open to a wide range of approaches which enable learners to arrive at this stage. Translation is an acceptable tool, particularly where the concurrent use of two languages enables concepts to be understood and depth of comprehension to be achieved. Many learners respond well to exploring and comparing versions of a text in different languages. In truly bilingual situations (Wales, Canada), ‘translanguaging’ is a teaching strategy

designed to promote the understanding of a subject in order to use the information successfully. In translanguaging, the input (reading or listening) tends to be in one language, and the output (speaking or writing) in the other. Input and output languages are systematically varied.

Because CLIL is seen not only as an approach to subject and language learning but also in broader educational and even political contexts as a means of understanding, proponents and exponents of CLIL see its advantages in terms of both achieving bilingualism and improving intercultural understanding.

In the cultural context, CLIL is seen to build intercultural knowledge & understanding by developing intercultural communication skills whilst learning about other countries/regions and/or minority groups [3]. Institutions using a CLIL approach are likely to enhance their profile by accessing international certification and preparing students for internationalisation, specifically EU integration.

Linguistically, CLIL not only improves overall target language competence, but also raises awareness of both mother tongue and target language while encouraging learners to develop plurilingual interests and attitudes. Content-wise, CLIL provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives, access subject-specific target language terminology and hence prepare for future studies and/or working life. Educationally, CLIL adds to complements individual learners' range of learning strategies while adding diversity and flexibility to existing methods and forms of classroom practice.

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